

Right place, right time

Off-duty firefighter helps rescue woman from fire

BY BECCA MANNING, CLIPPER STAFF

Duxbury firefighter John Montosi had just finished his errands and was heading toward his home in Pembroke after a day of ice rescue training for the Duxbury Fire Department when he saw smoke in the sky over Valley Street.

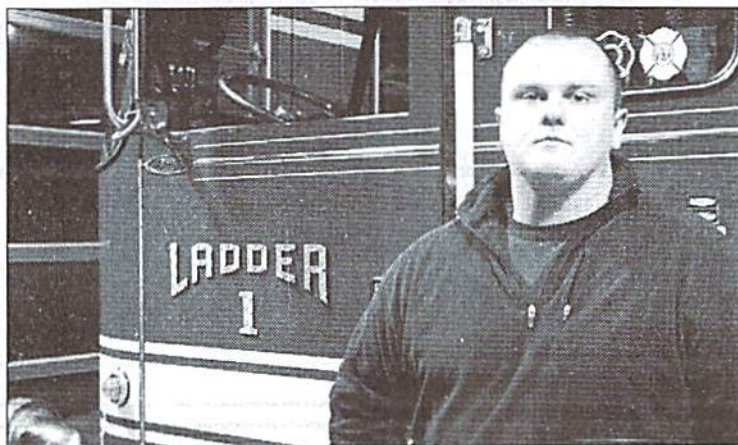
"I was about a half a mile away ... and I wanted to check to make sure that the Pembroke Fire Department was on the scene," Montosi said.

But when he arrived at 35 Valley Street, where flames and smoke were pouring from the house, garage and breezeway, there were no trucks in sight.

Meanwhile, neighbor Jake Licoski had seen the fire and called police, then went to the house to see if he could help.

"I could hear her, but I couldn't see anything," Licoski said. That's when Montosi showed up. Off duty, he didn't have his firefighting gear with him and also couldn't get into the house.

"I tried to get in the front door. I couldn't get in because it was too hot, too much smoke. There were neighbors on the scene also, so between



Duxbury firefighter John Montosi, a Pembroke resident, was heading home on Tuesday when he saw the fire and stopped to help neighbor Jake Licoski and another man rescue a woman.

myself and them we were able to break the window, and I reached in and grabbed her hand and pulled her toward the window. She was trying to get out, and we were pulling and carrying her, so we were lucky enough to get her out of the building," Montosi said.

Mrs. Lueder was responsive, he said, but had suffered some burns and was having trouble breathing from the smoke. She was treated by Pembroke firefighters and paramedics when they arrived shortly after, along with Kingston and Duxbury officials.

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— Deputy Chief Chris West

But Montosi's part in the rescue wasn't over.

"We were a little short-handed so I got to drive the ambulance," he said later that evening at the Duxbury station, where he was interviewed by several local television reporters. "The paramedics and the firefighters from Pembroke took good care of her, but I was able to drive."

Montosi and Kingston paramedics transported Vida and her husband Hans Lueder to South Shore Hospital, where they were treated and released that evening, according to a hospital spokesperson. Montosi was treated for minor cuts on his hand by paramedics at the scene.

"I was just in the right place at the right time," he said of the rescue, chalking it up to luck. "Everything happened really fast. It just went by quick. ... Anybody in my position would do the exact same thing. It's what we're trained to do, and whether you're on duty or off duty, it doesn't matter."

He said seeing how quickly his neighbor's home went up in flames has made him think twice about what he would do if faced with a fire in his own home, which was built around the same time as the Lueders.

"It was unbelievable. It just totally went up," he said. "If I ever have a fire in this house, I'm out of here. I'm not grabbing anything, just getting my wife and kids out."

A full-time Duxbury firefighter for just over two years,

Montosi said he has worked fires before but that Tuesday's blaze was a new experience.

"That was the first time that I've ever been to a fire where there was someone still inside," he said. "It was a good end result."

Pembroke Fire Chief Jim Neenan said he didn't realize Montosi and neighbors had rescued Mrs. Lueder until after

returning to the station from fighting the fire.

"When I got there [to the scene] I was informed that he [Montosi] was helping one of the occupants who was injured in the fire. I know he's a paramedic," Neenan said. He learned of the efforts of Montosi and passersby after getting a call from a TV station.

Duxbury Deputy Fire Chief Chris West praised Montosi's efforts.

"His training basically kicked in. Life safety is number one," West said. "I told him yesterday, this is a once-in-a-career opportunity and to savor the moment, because this is what you train for."

Though fire officials deal with fires of all sizes, accidents and other emergencies, pulling someone from a fire is not a regular event, West said.

"You very rarely get the opportunity to actually rescue somebody from a burning building," he said. "The department is very proud of him. He represented the department to the standards that we hoped he would. I would hope any other member of this department would have done the same thing."